

Committee on Children

Testimony for Public Hearing

Tuesday, 17 February, 2015

Testimony RE: SB 321, HB6725, HB6741

Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Queen and I am here to testify in support of three bills, SB 321 concerning Infant Toddler Education and Development, HB 6725 concerning Animal Assisted Therapy Services, and 6741 concerning Cadmium in children's jewelry.

As a member of the Task Force that was convened to study the effects of cadmium in children's jewelry and to make recommendations, I support passage of HB6741 to limit the amount of cadmium in jewelry designed to be worn by children. As with lead and other heavy metals, cadmium may be particularly hazardous to young children, especially those who mouth or chew on jewelry. Young children play with jewelry and frequently chew or simply mouth a necklace or bracelet. They may unwittingly be ingesting unhealthy amounts of the cadmium used to strengthen the alloy or coating on the jewelry. The effects of cadmium poisoning are apparently similar to those of lead or any heavy metal and can cause irreparable harm to the child. We banned lead without a problem, it is now time to limit cadmium in the same way.

As a retiring director of a state funded child development center and co-chair of the State Funded Child Development Centers Directors Forum, I urge your support of the concept bill SB321, An Act Concerning an Infant and Toddler Education and Development Program. Connecticut's funded child care programs serving low and moderate income working parent families known as the Child Day Care (CDC) programs boast a 47 year commitment of providing comprehensive early care and education in NAEYC Accredited facilities. We have embraced even higher standards for our teachers but struggle with a "perfect storm" in meeting new program standards and teacher credentials because of inadequate reimbursements to support infant/toddler ratios, regulations, and best practice. With Charter and Magnet schools and increased interest in public schools providing preschool education, our centers cannot maintain current services. Preschool slots have always been used to offset the nearly double cost of infants and toddlers. Without those preschoolers, we cannot afford the infants and toddlers. We are committed to working with the Office of Early Childhood to develop a comprehensive system for the care and education of our children from birth to school age and urge passage of SB 321 to assist in that process.

Finally, I urge your passage of HB 6725 Concerning Animal Assisted Therapy Services. This bill is a no cost solution to the provision of important activities and services. We now know that there is extraordinary value in the human animal bond. We understand

that animals can provide comfort to individuals suffering from traumatic experiences or in the aftermath of critical incidents. This bill gives us an opportunity to update state law to reflect this understanding of the value of human-animal interactions.

I have been involved in volunteer dog training activities in Connecticut since 1972. I was a founding member of Connecticut Canine Search and Rescue, Resources in Search and Rescue, volunteer search and rescue teams, trainer and past president of Cheshire Dog Training Club, and currently assist with training at Cheshire Park and Recreation Dept. classes. I have trained with the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation. My Newfoundland Dogs are registered with Pet Partners as rated for complex environments, were trained as Crisis Dogs through Animal Assisted Crisis Response and we currently volunteer with Soul Friends. We have been involved in the aftermath of the Newtown tragedy, last year's tragedy in Milford, and many other critical incidents. This bill enables us to clarify the definitions of animal assisted activity versus therapy, train DCF staff, and most importantly, define a protocol to mobilize trained volunteer teams to help in times of need.

During and after critical incidents, local authorities are inundated with offers of help from the community. This bill will help us coordinate and mobilize resources to assist during those times and hopefully to minimize the chaos that sometimes unwittingly occurs, thereby allowing prompt and controlled response from trained and registered volunteer teams.

We urge your passage of HB 6725. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Respectfully Submitted:

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Force on Cadmium in Children's Jewelry; Volunteer Dog Handler, Trainer

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